



For Immediate Release

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***ENZI PRAISES APPROVAL OF AGREEMENT TO RENEW,
STRENGTHEN CRITICAL HEAD START ACT***

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY), Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, today said a House-Senate Conference Committee approved an agreement on the "Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007," a bill that will improve Head Start programs and ensure that "all children, regardless of background, enter school ready to learn and succeed."

"After many false starts, we have finally reached an agreement on the reauthorization of the Head Start Act," Enzi said. "This conference agreement is a bipartisan, bicameral effort to ensure that low-income children are prepared not only for success in school, but for later success in life as well."

Head Start currently serves over 900,000 children and their families through a network of about 1,600 public and private agencies.

"For many students, Head Start is the beginning of a lifetime of learning opportunities," Enzi said. "It is vital that we set clear standards for this critical first step to ensure that these children can develop the knowledge and skills they need to learn and succeed. This bill also strengthens standards for Head Start teachers to ensure that Head Start programs maximize the impact they have on children. I am particularly pleased with the accountability provisions put forward in this conference report."

The conference report on the bill, H.R. 1429, is similar to legislation introduced by Senator Enzi, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Chairman of the HELP Committee, Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT), Chairman of the Children and Families Subcommittee, and Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Ranking Member of the Children and Families Subcommittee, and passed by the HELP Committee. It sets clear standards and measures for Head Start programs, improves coordination with other early childhood education programs, and strengthens program accountability.

"I want to particularly note the emphasis we have placed on the role of parents in Head Start programs," Enzi said. "This conference agreement increases the presence of

parents in Head Start programs, strengthens services for families, and provides training and development opportunities for parents that serve on policy councils and governing bodies.”

“This conference agreement is an important step. Now we need to turn our attention to reviewing the effectiveness of and the need for the 57 other early childhood and preschool programs that receive federal support. Head Start is an effective program that deserves our continued support – support that should not be diluted by competing programs or new authorizations.”

- Conference Agreement Highlights – H.R. 1429 -

Enables More Low-Income Children to Get a Head Start:

- Allows grantees to serve additional children from families with income up to 130 percent of poverty to be served; formula allocation remains at 100 percent of poverty;
- Provides for the expansion of both Head Start and Early Head Start programs with additional funds going to states serving fewer than 60 percent of eligible children;
- Establishes annual \$10 million increases for both the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program and the Indian Head Start program;
- Allows programs flexibility in converting part-day to full-day slots and preschool slots to Early Head Start slots based on community needs.

Strengthens the Accountability of Head Start programs:

- Increases accountability and improves the overall quality of Head Start grantees by requiring all grants to be designated for renewal every five years;
- Improves Head Start accountability and monitoring by defining terms used during the review process and requiring interrater reliability checks;
- Clarifies and strengthens the role of the governing board in the oversight of Head Start programs by defining responsibilities regarding legal and financial decisions and the collaborative role of the policy councils in decisions and operations of Head Start programs;
- Retains and codifies the active participation of parents in the grantee policy councils and policy committees of delegate agencies;
- Improves community needs assessments and self-assessments as tools for program improvement and meeting the community needs. Places a salary cap on Head Start key staff.

Strengthens the Head Start Workforce:

- Strengthens the Head Start workforce skills by establishing goals for educational standards for Head Start teachers, curriculum specialists and teacher assistants;

- Requires all Head Start teachers to have at least 15 hours of in-service training every year;
- Ensures a professional development plan for all Head Start staff working directly with children;
- Requires that up to 3 percent of Head Start funds be used for training and technical assistance for grantees.

Strengthens Head Start Coordination and Collaboration:

- Promotes collaboration and coordination among programs serving young children by aligning Head Start services with state early learning standards, coordinating professional development opportunities for Head Start staff, and promoting partnerships between Head Start agencies and other organizations to improve the Head Start curriculum;
- Authorizes funds for Centers of Excellence to designate model exemplary Head Start programs in every state;
- Requires states to designate or establish a State Advisory Council on early care and education from birth to school entry that would identify barriers to, and opportunities for, collaboration between federal and state programs.

Strengthens the Academic Portion of Head Start:

- Retains and strengthens the Head Start quality performance standards to ensure program quality and comprehensive services;
- Strengthens the academic component of Head Start and requires Head Start agencies to utilize scientifically-based measures to support classroom practice and program evaluation;
- Requires Head Start teachers to receive on-going literacy training, including methods to best meet the needs of English language learners;
- Requires the Secretary to incorporate, as appropriate, the recommendations of the National Academy of Science study on Developmental Outcomes and Assessments for Young Children into any assessments used in Head Start programs;
- Suspends implementation and terminates further development and use of the National Reporting System.

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